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SUBJECT: USUNESCO: 33RD GENERAL CONFERENCE EDUCATION
COMMISSION-US ACHIEVES ITS GOALS

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: The work of Commission II (education) during the 33rd General Conference was the culmination of the US Delegation's work since the US reentry into UNESCO in October 2003. It produced results by injecting momentum into the moribund UN Literacy Decade; by completing - with US agreement -- a convention to discourage illegal performance enhancers in sports (septel); by launching a totally revised Education for Sustainable program and by derailing efforts to turn a positive initiative on cross-border higher education quality into a normative instrument with restrictions on trade in educational services. End Summary

[1](#)2. This was the first General Conference since the U.S. returned to UNESCO in 2003, and signs of the U.S. impact on the organization are already clear. Managerial concepts that the U.S. has been advocating for the past two years, such as accountability, measurable results, fiscal responsibility, the need for greater focus on core priorities, cross-sector coordination and consolidation of key initiatives, have now become a regular part of the organization's vocabulary.

[1](#)3. This was particularly evident as the Commission dealt with numerous draft resolutions (DR) with financial implications. Unlike past General Conferences where Member States usually accepted any DR regardless of its financial implications, this time, with the help of the Director General's call for more focus, these initiatives were rebuffed.

[1](#)4. This is a sign of a culture change at UNESCO in the education field. Relentless insistence by the US and other like-minded countries on what matters most to transform the organization produced a much richer debate in Commission II than at the last General Conference and, more importantly, more logical and strategic decisions for the education program and budget.

Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) Launch

[1](#)5. During the first week of the General Conference, the Director-General - joined by U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings and others - launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) and announced the first 10 pilot countries: Bangladesh, Egypt, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and Yemen. This document included extensive comments and suggestions provided by USDel.

Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education

[1](#)6. The US helped draft the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education that are best practices to assist consumers worldwide in choosing educational services from foreign providers. USDel worked with like-minded countries to block efforts by Brazil, India and others to prevent turning this into a normative instrument with restrictions on trade in educational services implement more stringent guidelines (that would also impede WTO actions in this area). Ultimately a better, clearer and non-restrictive draft decision was adopted by consensus.

Budget

[1](#)7. The US succeeded in getting more of the budget's education sector money directed to the three core priorities: literacy, teacher training and HIV/AIDS education - all of which target Africa in great proportion.

Medium-Term Strategy

[1](#)8. There was broad consensus in favor of a resolution that set the format and procedure to be followed in drafting the next medium-term strategy. The aim of the resolution is to ensure that member states take a pro-active role in the process; for the U.S., this presents an opportunity to enhance UNESCO's focus on programs, rather than on normative instruments.

Education Roundtable

¶10. Once again, education ministers met for two days to discuss key issues surrounding UNESCO's mission to achieve Education for All. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' remarks were particularly well received. With an eye on the upcoming 5th High Level Group meeting in Beijing, China, the group boiled down their views in a communiqué about what they will do in their own countries and what they want UNESCO to do to speed the progress on EFA.

http://www.unesco.org/education/mined2005/com_munique.pdf

Decade for Education for Sustainable Development

¶11. Since last spring, USDel has worked to curb the excesses in a proposed framework to guide the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development. The document, a 52-page rambling and unfocused effort prepared by UNESCO at the request of the UN General Assembly, pleased no one when initially presented at the April 2005 Executive Board. At the time, USDel called for major changes and the document was revised and presented during the General Conference.

¶12. A number of delegations during the General Conference urged new ADG/Education Peter Smith to consolidate the various education initiatives - Education for All, UN Literacy Decade, Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, Literacy Initiative for Empowerment, HIV/AIDS education, and the Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa -- to minimize overlap and maximize results.

¶13. Comment: Unlike the fireworks in the cultural commission, the education commission dealt with some difficult issues and reached consensus. There was a spirit of cooperation and openness in this commission that was absent in the cultural commission. The U.S. came back to UNESCO primarily to focus on educational programs and our return is already bearing fruit. The task of getting more focus to the education programs has been something like turning a super tanker; it is slow at first but eventually the ship starts turning, and that is what we are seeing.

OLIVER